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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

NFAC 2170-80
24 March 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment
National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM: Robert C. Ames
National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia

SUBJECT: Monthly Warning Assessment: Near East and South Asia

1. Syria. Although reporting is mixed as to the seriousness of the current instability in Syria, community representatives felt it was sufficiently ominous to consider regional consequences of President Assad being overthrown or of civil chaos during which governmental authority would be seriously weakened. Most representatives felt that on the whole the Soviets would be reluctant to become involved in Syria's domestic troubles but that it is possible Assad might turn to them or Cuban surrogates for help. In addition to possibly requesting additional Soviet security advisors, it was felt that Assad might draw closer to the Soviet Union in an attempt to protect his beleaguered fortunes.

Representatives generally felt that Syria might continue to withdraw troops from Lebanon in order to constrict its overall exposure but that it would probably not withdraw totally or in other ways act precipitately in Lebanon. The possibility of either Syria or Israel exploiting tensions between them as a reaction to domestic turmoil in Syria was rated as low. Nevertheless, some representatives expressed concern about the alarmist tone of recent Israeli reporting on Syrian intentions and thus are worried about possible miscalculations on both sides.

2. May Deadline for Autonomy Talks. Opinion was somewhat divided on how Egypt might react to what is expected to be either an inconclusive or unspectacular passing of the May 26 deadline for the completion of negotiations

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between Egypt and Israel on the autonomy plan. Community representatives felt that if an agreement is reached it has virtually no chance of attracting interest from Palestinians or other Arabs and that if an agreement is not reached, Egypt would probably, with some negative posturing, continue to negotiate. Although the view was expressed that Sadat might use the deadline as the moment for departure from the negotiating process as it is currently structured, this concern was not shared by most representatives.

3. Pakistan. Representatives spent considerable time discussing Pakistan and the repercussions of President Zia's rejection of the US aid offer. It was felt that Zia -- no matter what the merits of his handling of the US -- would be blamed for having narrowed Pakistan's maneuverability in the face of a very serious threat from the Soviet Union. Although it was noted that there appears to be no individual or clique in the military angling for Zia's job, general dissatisfaction with his performance, recent changes in key positions in the Martial Law Administration, and rumors of coup plotting continue to undermine Zia's precarious position.

4. Arab Conference. The next major Arab conclave will be held in Tunisia on March 22. Concern was expressed that the issue of sanctions against Egypt would probably come up again and that Iraq -- having failed to arrange its own meeting in Baghdad -- might use the convention to press its Pan-Arab Charter. Although the charter is far from completely formulated and seems to have lost some of the support it had initially received, it nevertheless holds the potential for complicating US efforts to gain access to military facilities in the Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf region.

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